London Borough of Hackney

Homelessness Strategy
2015-2018
### Hackney Homelessness Strategy 2015-2018

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Introduction

Hackney published its first Homelessness Strategy in 2007 which was focussed on preventative action. The approach included a commitment to tackling unemployment amongst the homeless population, supporting homeless households in bidding for properties through Hackney’s choice based lettings system and providing dedicated support to the most vulnerable and hard to reach as well as residents who are often hard to engage in our community.

Since 2007, the increase in demand for affordable housing has been driven by the impact of the economic downturn, welfare reform under the Coalition Government, an increasingly unaffordable private rented sector, the long term social and affordable housing shortage, and cuts / restraints on local authority funding as a result of Government austerity measures. Therefore the pressures the Council faces in preventing homelessness have intensified.

Despite these testing conditions, the Council has had some notable achievements in tackling homelessness using the framework set by the 2007 strategy:

- exceeded the targets for homelessness prevention despite an extremely unfavourable market. Successfully preventing homelessness for 936 households in 2014/15. An increase of 147 households from 2010/11
- met the significant increase in demand for housing and homelessness advice and support, for single people and families. Currently offering over 4000 individual appointment per year with the Housing Advice Service.
- put in place new measures to improve the through flow of families out of temporary accommodation and into permanent settled accommodation via the Move On Project, which works with households that have become entrenched in temporary accommodation. The project engages directly with residents, encouraging them to bid and working with them on how they can maximise the possibility of securing an offer.

Despite the progress made, a significant number of Hackney households remain at risk of becoming homeless and demand on borough services continues to grow. As well as the traditional drivers of homelessness, the ongoing impact of welfare reform, particularly the restriction in financial support for housing costs has severely affected the ability of low income families to maintain their tenancies or source alternative sustainable and affordable accommodation within the borough. This is a trend which is likely to continue.

Consequently the strategy has been reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose and is able to respond to these challenges over the next three years.
AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Our Approach - the 2015/18 Homelessness Strategy

Hackney Council remains committed to preventing and reducing homelessness, tackling the main causes of homelessness and supporting those in need.

The new Homelessness Strategy is a response to a period of unprecedented change, including social housing and welfare reforms. It builds on the achievements of the previous Homelessness Strategy, whilst responding and adapting to the changing environment in which homelessness and support services are delivered.

The primary strategic focus is on finding long term sustainable housing solutions for people threatened with homelessness; offering high quality and innovative services to homeless households; and working with homeless households to explore the full range of housing options available to them.

Our aim for this Strategy is to “deliver accessible services to prevent homelessness and assist homeless households in finding long term affordable and sustainable housing”

The main objectives for this Strategy are

1. to offer a high quality and innovative service to homeless households,
2. to assist households in crisis to explore all the options available to them and
3. to find long term housing solutions for people threatened with homelessness.
THE HACKNEY CONTEXT

The background against which this homelessness strategy is to be implemented has changed considerably since the previous strategy was put in place.

The London borough of Hackney is one of the most diverse communities in the UK, with a population in excess of 246,000, and over half of whom are from BME communities speaking 118 community languages.

The population of the borough is expected to grow by up to 48,000 over the next 20 years and a study by Mayhew Associates in 2011 found people moving into the borough tended to be younger than those moving out and it also noted an increase in births in recent years.

Hackney is undergoing a rapid change in its socio-economic profile, with improved transport links, a rapidly developing local economy, schools and parks, the expanding fashion hub, a growing IT related industry and other improvements to the social wellbeing of the area have all made Hackney a particularly attractive place to live.

However, this is having an extra-inflationary impact on the costs of housing and has changed the expectations and demands tenants are making of the market and of the Council.

Yet Hackney remains one of the most deprived London boroughs with 19.3% of the population receiving out of work benefits. The proportion of adults in work has increased over the last five years and is now close to the London average, but the number of people claiming out of work benefits has not fallen significantly over the last 10 years and is still around 30,000.

In 2011, median gross weekly pay for full-time workers living in Hackney was £620 per week, compared with £648 in London and £500 for Great Britain. Hackney has over 41,000 households receiving some form of housing support. Most of these households have seen the level of support they receive reduced as a consequence of the welfare reform programme.

Nearly half of all households in Hackney rent from a social landlord. They are more likely to experience higher unemployment rates and lower average incomes than people residing in other tenures. However a third of all households are now private renters as Hackney has experienced a doubling in the proportion of households who rent from a private landlord.

The number of homes in Hackney has increased by around 1,000 homes a year since 1981. This trend is set to continue for the next 15 years with estate renewal and town centre improvement schemes.

9,853 new homes were completed between 2005-6 and 2011-12, 44% of these were affordable homes; social rented and shared ownership housing built by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). The remaining homes, were for private sale.
The latest Government figures (June 2015) show Hackney delivered 3,740 affordable homes (social rent, affordable rent, intermediate rent and affordable home ownership) between 2010/11 and 2014/15. This makes Hackney the third highest performing authority for Affordable Housing delivery in England.

Hackney is midway through a significant regeneration of the Colville and Woodberry Down Estates, which is part of Hackney Council's borough-wide 2,760-home estate regeneration programme. This programme is one of London's largest schemes for building homes for social renting, shared ownership, and private sale, now in its fourth year providing 201 social rented homes, 20 shared ownership/equity homes, and 42 homes for private sale built so far. Furthermore, in excess of 300 homes, are expected to start on site this year. It is estimated that an extra 24,000 homes will be built in the borough by 2026.
NEW CHALLENGES

National

Since the 2007 Homelessness Strategy was published, the landscape has changed dramatically. A new Mayor of London was elected in 2008 followed by a coalition Government in 2010 and a number of significant changes ensued:

1 Welfare reform

Since 2010, the Government has introduced a number of legislative changes that significantly impact upon current and future housing needs, and the ability of local housing partners to respond to these needs. This includes the Government’s ongoing welfare reform programme, which has substantial implications for housing and homelessness;

1.1 Changes to the Local Housing Allowance

The welfare reform programme commenced in 2010 with changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which provides rent support for households living in the private rented sector.

The reforms have both capped the amount payable and disaggregated the calculation from market rent (linked to CPI since April 2013) and restricted to the bottom 30% of private market rents. Consequently as rents in Hackney rise, the difference between rent charged and the maximum support payable grows.

Impact in Hackney:

Rents in Hackney increased by an average 27% from April 2013 to September 2015 (this varies depending on the property type), whereas the rise in the level of support has been fixed at 1% for the last two years. Rents for bedsits have increased an astonishing 62% over this period. Consequently, significantly less than 30% of the properties in the private sector are within the LHA ceiling.

This not only increases the potential for low income households to become homeless through accrued rent arrears, but also makes it very difficult for the council to secure accommodation in the private sector when landlords can achieve a higher return from the open market
1.2 Non Dependent Deductions

April 2011 also saw changes in deductions from housing benefit payable to private and social housing tenants for non dependent adults in the household.

1.2 Shared accommodation rate

In January 2012 the maximum amount of Housing Benefit payblet for single people under 35 was restricted to the LHA rate for a room, and not the rate for a self contained flat. The change has significantly impacted demand levels for shared accommodation in the borough, as individuals have been forced to downsize from a one bed flats in shared accommodation to a room.

1.3 The Benefit Cap

The Welfare Reform Act 2013 included within it measures to restrict the total amount of social security benefits paid (including Housing Benefit) to a working age household; effectively a Benefit Cap.

The amount of benefit paid is capped at £500 per week for couples and lone parent households and £350 per week for single adult households. This cap is set to be further reduced to £442 per week and £296 per week for Londoners from Autumn 2016. Households who were receiving more than the cap amount have had their Housing Benefit reduced accordingly.

This has had a particularly negative impact on larger households on low income, as after meeting their personal needs the amount of support left over to meet their housing costs does not cover the rental charge, even where the letting is in the social sector.

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**RENT VS LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE**

- **Room**: Average Monthly Rent Aug 2015 (Blue) vs. LHA Payable (inner east) (Orange)
- **One Bed**
- **Two Bed**
- **Three Bed**
- **Four Bed**

- **Rent vs LHA Payable**
  - Room: £0.00 to £1,000.00
  - One Bed: £1,000.00 to £2,000.00
  - Two Bed: £2,000.00 to £3,000.00
  - Three Bed: £3,000.00 to £4,000.00
  - Four Bed: £4,000.00 to £5,000.00
The Cap is inhibiting the ability of the Council to secure affordable accommodation for these households. Housing Association Leasing (HALS) providers have pulled out of the sector due to the Benefit Cap.

1.4 Removal of the spare room subsidy/Bedroom Tax

New size criteria rules for working age Housing Benefit recipients renting in the social rented sector were introduced in April 2013. A reduction is made from the amount of support payable where the property is considered to have more bedrooms than the household needs.

However, a supply of smaller more suitably sized properties is not readily available in Hackney and consequently households are stuck in properties which they cannot afford, increasing the level of rent arrears and potentially leading to eviction.

There is a secondary impact on homelessness teams; this additional competition for smaller accommodation makes it much more difficult for Councils to source temporary accommodation; we are aware that other Social Landlords are offering fewer units to the Council as they seek to rehouse their current tenants.

1.5 Localising resettlement support

In March 2013 the Social Fund ended. This funding stream had been a key component in the prevention of homelessness and the resettlement of homeless families, providing access to funds to purchase essential household items and assistance with removal costs. In its place, responsibility for this type of support has been devolved to local authorities. Some funding has been provided to Hackney through the Department for Work and Pensions, However, there is no guarantee that this funding will remain.

1.6 Withdrawal of support from European Union Jobseekers

From April 2014, new EEA migrants are not able to apply for Housing Benefit while they are in receipt of income related Jobseeker’s Allowance.

Job seeking EEA migrants staying in Hackney do not have the right to an allocation of housing from the Council or to get homelessness assistance, consequently there is a potential for some migrants to end up becoming street homeless.

1.7 Government Budget implications 2015

The new Government is to introduce some new measures as part of its austerity drive. These will include further reduction of the benefit cap and the removal of housing benefit for under 21 year olds, the forced sale of ‘high value’ council homes and the sale of housing association properties through the extension of right to buy.

These reforms impact all homeless households (and households at risk of becoming homeless) to some degree, but it is those at either end of the spectrum, large non-working families and young single people, that are the most affected. Our updated strategy recognises this and outlines how Hackney can help these families lessen the impact of the reforms.
Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011 introduced important reforms to social housing and homelessness:

- The Act enabled councils to permanently discharge their homelessness duty by making use of available suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Councils are able to develop their own allocation procedures and introduces fixed-term tenancies for social housing providers to offer social tenants, including a minimum tenancy of five years.
- The Act also changed the statutory succession rights of new tenants, restricting the right to the partner of the deceased tenant.

Impact in Hackney

This new flexibility could help Hackney to tackle the increase in homeless households by freeing up valuable housing stock for those who need it most.

By discharging into the private sector the Council will be able to reduce the costs associated with expensive temporary accommodation, which are insecure and unsettled, in favour of an assured shorthold tenancy, particularly where appropriate social sector housing is in short supply and the time spent in temporary accommodation is likely to be prolonged.

There are risks associated with adopting this approach:

- a danger of creating a ‘revolving door’ of homelessness, as homeless applicants take up private rented tenancies which subsequently come to an end and they then make further applications for homelessness assistance.
- concerns that chaotic households and those struggling to cope with addiction/health/behavioural issues will have less sympathetic landlords, an increasing concern as the transition to Universal Credit will involve rent support payments being made to the tenant.
- apprehension over the quality of housing likely to be made available from within the private sector, even though the Council is committed to improving standards.

Customer Care and the NPSS Gold Standard

In August 2012, the Government published a Homelessness prevention strategy: “Making every contact count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness”. It posed ten challenges and Hackney is committed to improving the overall level of service it provides and will seek to meeting the ten local challenges:
1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
4. To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
6. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme (no longer active but we will work with home owners who are at risk of losing their home).
8. To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
9. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

This new strategy outlines the safeguards to be put in place in Hackney to help mitigate these risks to ensure that homeless households are neither inappropriately housed nor condemned to a carousel of repeated applications, and that we continue to meet our legal and social obligations.

Regional Context

Mayor of London’s Housing Plan

The Mayor of London published his new housing strategy in 2014. It identifies the most significant issue as “...the massive shortfall of homes that most Londoners can afford. Addressing this is essential to ensure London’s continued growth and the retention of its status as a pre-eminent global city.”

To that end, the plan concentrates almost exclusively on increasing supply and sets out a long term target of delivering 42,000 new homes per annum; of which at least 17,000 should be affordable. More specifically the plan sets out the intention that “in
the 2015-18 investment period the Mayor will deliver 15,000 affordable homes per annum. This will comprise:

- forty per cent for low cost home ownership
- sixty per cent for affordable rent comprising ‘capped’ rent and ‘discounted’ rent products with the latter intended to be prioritised for low income working households."

The introduction of Affordable Rents by the Government gives providers the flexibility to charge up to 80% of market rent, although the Council has set out an expectation that rents will be set between 50% and 70% of the market value (depending on the size of the property) as part of the Council’s Tenancy Strategy.

However, in practice this will still be unaffordable to many low income households. 50% of the average market rent for a three bedroom property in Hackney exceeds £350.00 per week, which is more than the Local Housing Allowance rate (the maximum amount of support payable to tenants in the private sector) set for the borough.

With specific regard to tackling homelessness in London, the plan stresses the flexibilities afforded by the Localism Act and calls on boroughs to make full use of them, particularly in utilising the private sector.

Tackling rough sleeping and street homelessness is also included within the Mayoral plan and looks to build on the “No Second Night Out” initiative, working with boroughs and voluntary services to promote a consistent approach across London.
HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

Performance against the 2007 strategy

The 2007 strategy was prescriptive and detailed based on Government guidelines and monitored internally, and the section below sets how the Council performed against the stated priorities. As set out earlier, the ability to achieve much of the intended outcomes were overtaken by the economic downturn, and actions from the new Government after 2010.

The 2007 Homelessness Strategy

The 2007 strategy identified seven priority areas:

**Priority 1**: Customer Care – to deliver the best possible customer care and improve customer engagement and input. Improved customer care leads to better communication and a more effective usage of resources;

**Priority 2**: Early Intervention and Prevention - to prevent the problems escalating. The earlier an intervention can take place the more successful the Council can be in preventing a crisis;

**Priority 3**: Youth Homelessness – to tackle the level of youth homelessness within the borough which remains stubbornly high. Being homeless as a young person has a devastating effect on an individual’s life opportunities. Homeless young people are much less likely to be in education, employment or training, are more likely to turn to crime and to become victims of crime, and have comparably worse health than their peers;

**Priority 4**: BME Housing – to address why BME are disproportionately represented within homeless households. This will enable greater social cohesion.

**Priority 5**: Support for Homeless People – to provide additional support to homeless households, promoting resettlement and allowing more vulnerable households to become independent. Without such support, they would be reliant on more intensive and costly interventions and would not have the same quality of life that independence brings them.

**Priority 6**: Single Homelessness – to assist vulnerable individuals and tackle rough sleeping. While single homeless people (or couples without children) are unlikely to be offered anything more than advice, assisting vulnerable individuals more proactively results in more effective use of resources.

**Priority 7**: Long Term Housing Options - to encourage households to look for other solutions – downsizing to reduce costs, moving into the private sector and/or taking advantage of the developing intermediate market in Hackney of low cost home ownership/shared ownership schemes.
What progress has been made?

Since the 2007 strategy was adopted, the Council has made real progress in tackling these priority areas. This progress includes:

- Achieving the Chartermark (now Customer Service Excellence) accreditation, an independent award that recognises excellent customer service delivery and engagement;

- A reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation by 50% (though this is now going into reverse)

- Making considerable investment in developing working relationships with other key agencies such MAPPA, MARAC, DV, Open Doors, Hospitals and Probation teams.

- Adopting a “One Council” approach across Hackney to addressing youth homelessness and in particular the needs of 16/17 year olds. The Council take a holistic approach with the Children and Young Persons Service and as consequence only a small number of under-18’s are making homeless applications.

- Commencing regular information sharing and dialogue with key community groups, including consultation and open days.

- Building real partnerships with specialist support providers to develop action plans and assessments of need for all households in temporary accommodation.

- Putting in place pathways for single homeless people and those found not to be in priority need for housing.

- Taking advantage of opportunities presented by the regeneration of a number of estates in Hackney to help families in temporary accommodation to access more affordable housing.
HOMELESSNESS SUMMARY

The rising rental market

As previously stated, Hackney has become an increasingly attractive place to live, particularly for young professionals and new families. This has had a significant impact on both the mortgage and rental market in the borough; Average house prices have increased by over 63% over the course of the last 5 years, which has had a corresponding impact on the local rental market, where rents have increased by between 32% and 75% over the same period.

![Average House Prices in Hackney over the last 20 years](image1)

![Average Rents in Hackney](image2)
Homelessness - the direction of travel

The most recent national statistics for 2014/15 showed that homelessness increased by 4% on the previous year, whilst in London they increased by 3%. Since 2009/10 acceptances have increased by 36% Across England whilst in London they have increased by 85%. In context of the current trends, it is recognised that 2009/10 was the lowest total.

London accounted for 32% of all acceptances in England in 2014/15. Around 40% of homelessness acceptances in Hackney arose from the termination of a private tenancy.

Looking at the last five years, the number of households the Council has accepted as statutory homeless has grown year on year, rising considerably in 2013-14 and staying at that level for 2014/15, which is 40% above the level in 2009/10. This coincides with the welfare reform timetable and in particular the restriction on rent support to tenants in the private sector.

These restrictions are reflected in the factors that led to the household becoming homeless; there is evidence that the growing gap between housing benefit and actual rents and the increasingly lucrative private sector market is encouraging landlords to evict tenants in favour of a new let at a much higher rent:

When comparing 2006/7 with 2013/14, there has been a significant shift in the main causes of homelessness - from exclusion by family and/or friends (51% of the total in 2006/7) to evictions from private sector accommodation (38% of the total in 2013/14).

It is also notable that over the same time period while the number of households being placed into temporary accommodation long term is gradually reducing, the number of households living in temporary accommodation has risen significantly. This is illustrative of the difficulties in maintaining churn and securing suitable settled accommodation into which these households can be placed.

How we can arrest these trends is a key component of our strategy for 2015-18.

Current demand in Hackney

Looking in more detail at the last 24 months, there has been a significant increase in the number of people seeking housing advice, and while the number of households that go on to make a homeless application dropped slightly, the number of acceptances increased, also reflecting the regional trend:
Homeless approach reasons for approved cases comparison 2013/14 - 2014/15

- Other reasons
- Mortgage arrears
- Left armed forces
- Other institution discharge
- Hospital discharge
- Prison discharge
- NASS
- Loss of private tenancy
- Rent arrears private tenancy
- Rent arrears Council or HA
- Violence outside the household
- Domestic Violence
- Family or friend exclusion

Number of visitors seeking Housing Advice

Accepted homeless – loss of AST

- 2012/13
- 2013/14
- 2014/15

- 218
- 292
- 327
Despite the increase in homelessness acceptances, there has been a flattening of the number of households going on to make an application to the Homeless Persons Unit. This is a reflection of the increase in alternative preventative options being made available and a greater awareness that applications for homelessness may not necessarily result in a more speedy placement into settled accommodation.

Part of the 2015-18 Strategy will be to examine the effectiveness of the alternative options being offered and whether they are producing long term solutions.
Comparison of homeless acceptances across London in 2014-15

The number of households being accepted in Hackney is high in comparison with most other London Boroughs, although four of the five boroughs with the highest level of acceptances are in East London. While this is to some degree driven by our demographics, we will investigate the approach being adopted by the other boroughs to identify any lessons to be learnt.

Street homelessness in Hackney

Street homelessness is the most visible form of homelessness and since 2010 the number of people seen sleeping rough has grown.

The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) research has identified the following:

- 7581 people were seen sleeping rough in London in 2014/15 – an increase of 16% on the previous year. Of these, 5107 were new to rough sleeping. This is a 17% increase from 2013/14.

- Hidden homelessness is rising – including people living in concealed, overcrowded and shared households – since before the current recession, reflecting mainly housing access and demographic pressures. Overcrowding has increased markedly since 2003, from 2.4% to 3% of all households - some 670,000 households in England.
In line with the trends identified in the CHAIN research, rough sleeping/street homelessness in Hackney is rising. The numbers identified as sleeping rough have increased over 171% in the last 5 years, from 57 to 155.

![Number of rough sleepers in Hackney](image1)

In additional to CHAIN data, the Council carry out a rough sleeper count once per year, usually in November. This provides a picture of who is sleeping out on any one night in Hackney in known hot spot areas.

![Rough sleeper count](image2)

It is likely that the incidences of rough sleeping will continue to grow due to the welfare reforms previously highlighted. Going forward to the Council will build on the partnerships and relationships already in place with the voluntary sector to mitigate this. This will form a part of the new Rough Sleeper Strategy to be published later in the year.
Building on the strengths of the 2007 strategy, the Council’s central aim remains the same: “to deliver accessible services to prevent homelessness and assist homeless households in finding long term affordable and sustainable housing”.

This is underpinned by three key objectives:

1. to offer high quality, collaborative and innovative services to homeless households,
2. to assist households at risk of homelessness to explore all options available to prevent homelessness
3. to find long term housing solutions for people threatened with homelessness.

In identifying these objectives, we recognise that different households (whether individual or families) will have different needs and support requirements. We are using the Strategy as a framework in which to explore initiatives and services through the Action Plan rather than an analysis of needs through the Strategy. In developing the action plan we will seek to work with our partners to direct available resources and services as appropriate.

The Council has identified key priorities for focus in the homelessness strategy. An Action Plan will be drafted and completed to accompany this Strategy prior to implementation. We have identified potential actions below each priority which have been raised through the consultation process. These will be discussed further through the Partnership Board in terms of timescale, and deliverability given the resources available to both the Council and its partners.

**Priorities for 2015-18**

**1 Priority - Customer Care**

With fewer resources available due to cuts in public spending it will be challenging for both the statutory and voluntary sector to continue delivering high quality services to help people avoid losing their homes and improve their lives. The Council will therefore explore the potential opportunities to achieve new and/or better ways of working;

We will examine both internal and external aspects of service delivery to maximise efficiency and drive effective communication, redesigning services around the needs of our customers and working better with partners. This will include looking to expand electronic transactions and communications and building towards being part of a Hackney digital account (One Account). This will enable customers to access information at all times including when the office is closed.
We will also work with our partners on how we can understand better the customer service experiences of those facing (or at risk of) homelessness to develop services that work better within the resources available.

Not all clients have the same ability to comprehend the information they need to enable us to assist them and will require working with partners to deliver the information and support to help clients.

### Potential Actions

- Continue working towards the Customer Service Excellence programme (NPSS Gold Standard) and look to develop outcomes that measure effectiveness as well as outcomes
- Understand customer experiences through a range of tools including a regular Intelligence and networking forum; Stakeholder Panel for agencies working with rough sleepers
- Ensure timely delivery of services that put clients at further risk of homelessness.
- Explore the use of alternative methods of communication including social media
- Equipping homeless people with the skills necessary to help them access services eg IT
- Review of how services are provided: One stop shop pilot for single homeless as an example.
- Explore triage approaches that puts the needs of the customer at the centre to help clients better understand the information required.
- Consider a holistic approach to addressing client needs where housing is just a symptom

### 2 Priority - Early Intervention and Prevention

The challenging economic climate has led to an increase in households in financial difficulties and it is anticipated this will be a continuing trend as public spending cuts and welfare and housing reforms take full effect. Early intervention can prevent these difficulties developing into homelessness.

The Council will refocus current advice and guidance provision to reflect the realistic options available to households, whilst looking to expand the range of options available. We will look to set out more clearly the provision that is available from the Council and its partners.

The Council will continue to promote its 10 steps to better private renting for tenants and landlords. This initiative seeks to improve the sector and help sustain people in good quality housing and working with good landlords.
We recognise the value of floating support and the Council will set out its supporting people commissioning intentions with a focus upon meeting those with most complex needs.

We will also seek to develop good links with other statutory agencies incl those in health services to exploit the use of resources to prevent homelessness, and provide the information to support their own clients.

**Potential Actions**

- Clear signposting of advice services for those that need it
- Consider floating support services to help prevent homelessness
- Greater collaboration with NHS agencies who work with excluded persons to prevent higher costs further on eg those with no recourse to public funds.
- Using estate management services to gain intelligence of rough sleeping in estate blocks
- Better collaboration across agencies including non-housing to identify people at risk GPs, schools
- Greater use of mediation tools to prevent homelessness within families
- Stronger links to employment agencies and financial advice services
- Closer links with NHS including mental health services to ensure discharges are planned
- Explore potential for peer mentoring, and non-contracted schemes to build resilience; and organisations that can build confidence and trust eg Royal British Legion
- Increase awareness of the realities of homelessness, the responsibilities and the consequential processes of failure to sustain tenancies

**3 Priority - Improving access for all**

The Council will investigate how to improve access and opportunity for all within Hackney.

Those most in need of our services sometimes have the greatest difficulty in connecting with us. We need to communicate effectively with providers and our residents and ensuring they have the information to help and support those at risk of homelessness especially with further welfare reform changes.. This will be achieved by working with partners on the Homelessness Forum and other key stakeholders.

Related to this, BME households are over represented within the statutory homelessness acceptances and in particular households from Black communities. Although some progress has been made through outreach work and better communication, there is a still a degree of over-representation amongst some communities which needs to be further explored through more focussed work;
Resources have diminished and we will work with partners to ensure the resources available are used most effectively without disadvantaging those most at risk of homelessness, and to explore how we can address the needs of those without recourse to public funds.

**Potential Actions**

- Understanding the complexities and needs of those with No recourse to public funds
- Review of street user outreach meetings
- Explore reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring boroughs
- Explore the current use of translations services and its effectiveness
- Closer engagement of DWP in the Single Homeless Hub
- Ensuring excluded / marginalised groups are engaged and informed on welfare reform changes
- Placed based analysis of homelessness problems to identify where support is needed.
- Use small communities to help better understand the issues as there will be people with lived experiences

**4 Priority - Support for single people**

We intend to continue to develop appropriate housing pathways and address the differing needs of single and non-priority households.

We will look to expand the signposting, support and guidance available through our options and advice services. This includes providing help in finding accommodation within the private rented sector.

Working with our partners and through our cooperatively commissioned services we will look to ensure that the support needs of vulnerable single people are delivered to a high standard. We will work with our partners:

- To strengthen partnership working
- To share good practice
- To foster innovative solutions to rough sleeping
- To develop sustainable housing options for rough sleepers
- To be sensitive to the needs of victims of Domestic Violence and building on the good work already in place with our partners
- Recognising the challenges of mental health upon single homeless people
- Being aware of the housing needs of care leavers
This work will also feed into the Council’s new Rough Sleeper Strategy.

Part of the work will involve greater working and collaboration with other services, including mental health and substance misuse, and also seek to engage with organisations that provide assistance for employment and financial training.

**Potential Actions**
- A more proactive approach to supporting resettlement into private rented sector
- Explore the potential of a No Second Night Out facility in the Borough
- Continue implementation of No First Night Out model in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and City of London
- Understanding the mental health needs of single homeless with a review of pathway in supported accommodation
- Develop staging post accommodation in the Borough
- Explore London wide approach to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) and understanding the implications for social housing tenure security
- Exploring the potential for peer mentoring and befriending schemes

**5 Priority - Wellbeing, involvement and choice**

The Council will focus on community engagement, presenting options to residents and examining ways to address or mitigate some of the effects of homelessness. The Council will also continue to organise events that provide information and support for homeless and housing advice agencies as well as community groups and residents who are likely to be most in need.

We will seek to develop clear links with health and employment services including public health and DWP to improve strategic approaches to service delivery. We will also look at the potential for increasing social capital through volunteering and consider how people with care needs (and in receipt of personal budgets) could work with commissioners to influence the market.

**Potential Actions**
- Learn from user experiences
- Explore other non standard housing models eg shared housing to reduce loneliness and isolation
- Develop role of health professionals into service delivery
- Continue with Greenhouse model that links housing and health, and potential extend to employment
• Recognise role and encourage use of voluntary sector agencies as a mechanism for engagement and accessing employment
• Engage service users into existing forums like the Single Homeless Forum.

6 Priority - Better use of resources and planning for emerging needs

The Council will continue to closely monitor current trends in Welfare Reforms/PRS/Lettings and other aspects that affect homelessness. This will allow for more strategic planning and a more flexible approach.

Potential Actions

• Recognise the needs of people with No Recourse to Public Funds and how these can be addressed
• Explore potential for engaging faith and communities based organisations esp in relation to rough sleeping
• Robust review of evictions process from hostels / TA that doesn’t lead to repeat homelessness and engages outreach teams in advance
• Joint outreach shifts with other services eg DAAT, Community Safety to avoid duplication
• Annual seminar arranged with partners on the emerging needs together with other Boroughs

7 Priority - Continuous review of the Choice Based Lettings scheme

The current lettings policy was introduced in April 2014. Monitoring is vital to review how effective the changes have been in ensuring priority households are able to access affordable housing and are exercising this option.

Potential Actions

• Consider how a review might assist more single households in the bidding process
• Ensure those in hostels are regularly bidding to avoid bed blocking
CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

As part of the Strategy development, we took the opportunity to consult with our internal and external partners.

The main approach to consultation took place in the form of a consultation survey which accompanied the draft strategy. We also held a focus group session with the Single Homelessness Forum, and staff have been consulted upon at various points to gather their input into the process.

The Strategy draft and priorities had been developed by building upon knowledge and experiences of the current issues and service needs and the draft priorities reflected this knowledge. We therefore focused on the seeking views on:

- The aim and objectives for the strategy
- What actions would help to address the draft strategic priorities?
- Ideas for helping the Council implement the Strategy given the available resources

All the complete responses received can be viewed on request.

The feedback received through the consultation process has been used to inform the final Strategy, and suggestions will be worked into the development of an action plan to support our priorities for action.
IMPLEMENTING THE NEW STRATEGY

Resource Management

How we prevent and manage homelessness in the borough must reflect the economic realities. The weakening of welfare support and the challenging local economic climate places increasing pressure on the ability of services to respond to growing needs. At the same time, major cuts in Government funding to local authorities brings an additional challenge of prioritising services and delivering efficiency savings.

When working to the new priorities the Council will be looking to support households to be better able to assist themselves and take control over their own lives. Scarce resources can then be focused on the support that is required by the most vulnerable households to prevent homelessness and reduce repeat homelessness.

Some of the actions identified through consultation (listed earlier) are already in place or will be implemented whilst others we will discuss and develop with our partners. The processes put in place and the actions taken will inform the approach to resource management and will be based on the following key principles: -

1. Managing Demand

Hackney Council cannot offer a home to everyone who presents with a housing crisis; therefore our focus has to be on how the Council and its partners can prevent a household becoming homeless in the first instance:

- By identifying a range of alternative solutions to their housing crisis
- By helping the household to explore those alternative options.

Some of the actions the Council will be taking include:

- Surveying customers to establish reasons for approaching the service and to help identify other solutions/options. This will then be part of an overall investigation into reducing demand on the service;
- Ensuring that services are delivered in a timely and accessible way, including outreach surgeries, triage and improved customer information on our website;
- Delivering on-line Housing Options and Advice services with a focus on homelessness prevention and managing demand;
- establishing stronger links with our internal and external partners;
- Putting in place a framework that ensures consistency;
- Reviewing with partners the effectiveness of mediation work in preventing homelessness.
2. Maximising Financial Support

Homeless households, or those at risk of becoming homeless, are almost universally also under severe financial strain. The Council will ensure households threatened with homelessness are accessing all the financial support they are entitled to, and payments are made promptly. Actions will include:

- Ensuring early identification of money problems which may cause homelessness and work with the Hackney Moneysmart initiative to offer debt advice;
- Working with other partners and Council Services to assist households with advice on budgeting, deposits and rent arrears.
- Ensure timely advice and information is provided on changes arising through welfare reform, and
- Embed links with employment and learning development services to provide residents with opportunities to access jobs and training

3. Driving Churn

Recognising there are finite resources available for placing households in temporary accommodation. It is important that homeless households are moved through into settled accommodation as soon as practicable.

However, in identifying settled accommodation, the Council must look to utilise all potential solutions, including those outside the borough and will:

- Encourage households in temporary accommodation to actively engage in the process of moving into settled accommodation, supporting them financially through resettlement funding
- Make effective use of the Estate Regeneration Programme to use vacant units as temporary accommodation to provide homeless families local and suitable accommodation
- Expanding on the successful Move-On project which assists households to bid for properties
- Ensure households in Temporary Accommodation are making informed assessments on all of the options available to them, including potential out of borough solutions – more detail on this is found to the Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2015-2018.

4. Maintaining Supply

In a highly competitive market, securing accommodation that can be used for temporary accommodation or for long term settlement will require innovative working and extended engagement.
Whilst committed to keeping households as local as possible the stark reality is that the costs of housing in Hackney will require that the Council consider looking much further afield to provide affordable accommodation, in some cases outside of London. The Council will continue to work with existing providers to maximise supply of property available, which could include incentives to secure local properties and offset expenditure on more expensive options such as hostels and Bed & Breakfast. Options have included:

- Introducing a Local Lettings Agency (Hackney Priority Homes) in 2014 which in the future will improve supply and quality of private sector offers;
- Encouraging landlords to become accredited through the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme with the aim of improving the quality of private sector properties across the borough;
- Ensuring best use of existing social housing in the borough is made through expanding and extending our relationships with Hackney Homes, other Social landlords and developer partners within the framework set out in the lettings plan for social lets to homeless households;
- Re-establishment of the Landlord Forums to widen the scope of advice given to landlords. In 2014/15 we held two Landlord Forums.

5. Customer Care and the NPSS Gold Standard

Hackney is committed to improving the overall level of service it provides. To this end the service has committed itself to achieving the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) Gold Standard which was outlined earlier. Our commitment to customer service is a key priority set out earlier.

6. Working in Partnership

This Homelessness strategy is in large part a commitment to partnership building: multi-agency working is essential to the implementation of the strategy. Working together to better understand the needs of, and achieve the best possible outcomes for, homeless and potentially homeless families and individuals needs a multi-agency approach.

There has never been a time where it has been more necessary to employ creative thinking and work together to make best use of resources, share information and expertise. In looking to extend the partnership arrangements already in place, improving engagement, facilitating greater empowerment and devolving of responsibilities must be seriously considered and discussed. This will include:

- Working with the Single Homeless Forum to promote partnership working and identify improvements in preventing homelessness through advice and assistance;
• Working with Registered Providers in relation to homelessness prevention, improving supply and churn;

• Continuing to work with all our partners to maximise resources targeted at homelessness prevention and improved efficiencies;

• Reviewing membership of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group annually;

• Active participation in all our local forums to share good practice, agree joint working arrangements and opportunities for joint funding;

• Consult regularly with service users to directly feed into future service developments;

• Review the effectiveness of outreach work in reducing homelessness among ethnic minority communities that are hard to engage;

• Exploring potential for peer mentoring schemes and befriending as well as community groups can work towards supporting our objectives

• Signing up to Notify2 when it becomes available - to improve access to services for homeless households in temporary accommodation. Homeless households are at particular risk of missing out on health, education and social services. They can be placed in temporary accommodation at some distance from their original home. NOTIFY can ensure that households receive the services they need by notifying the relevant agencies when they move into, between and out of temporary accommodation;

• Continue to work with the Ways into Work team to promote the move into employment.

• Development of the tri-borough partnership following successful acquisition of funding.

In July 2014 Hackney along with Tower Hamlets and the City of London, put in a bid for £330,000 to run a cross borough single homeless project targeting rough sleeping. The bid was successful and we were awarded £250,000 from the DCLG and £80,000 from Mayor of London. We are currently in the process of setting up a cross-borough rough sleeping assessment and reconnection team. The aim of the project is to significantly reduce rough sleeping in the three boroughs with a final aim of eradicating it altogether.

Resources

It is envisaged that the delivery of the action plan will be funded using existing resources for homelessness across Hackney. The Council’s main resources for tackling and preventing homelessness are:

1. **General Fund** - The Council’s General Fund accounts for a large proportion of homelessness and other related services funding. In 2014/15 the gross
expenditure budget for the Homelessness and Housing Options Service was £1,617,394

2. **Preventing Homelessness Grant** - The Government has allocated £400 million over four years to support local authorities in preventing homelessness. Hackney received £975,711 of Homelessness Prevention Grant in 2015/16. This is not a ring-fenced grant.

We will seek to maximise funding opportunities from external sources including the Mayor of London, and work with external agencies and the voluntary sector to ensure resources are used to benefit residents and meet the strategic priorities set out.

**The Next Steps**

This strategy and the objectives within it will now form the basis for our ongoing engagement with our partners going forward into 2018. From this engagement we will formulate a concrete plan of action to set out responsibilities timeframes, and lead organisations. This will not always be Hackney Council, and the action plan will identify the resources available to meet the objective identified.

The development of this strategy has also informed the Council’s Temporary Accommodation Strategy and the more radical approach it sets out for managing rising demand. These two strategies are interlinked and should be read in together in that context.

The Council will establish a Hackney Homelessness Partnership Board, a cross-agency body of statutory, community and voluntary organisations providing services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, to lead on the governance and monitoring on the statement and action plan. This includes developing a new Rough Sleeper Strategy and updating the action plan on an annual basis.

Additionally, there is a requirement to extend our engagement with both Social Services and Health authorities as a consequence of the Care Act 2014. The Act identifies Housing as a health related function, particularly with regard to the prevention/delay/reduction in care and support needs. The Housing Advice Service will have a significant input into the care plans and safeguarding of vulnerable adults.

Following consultation with Members on this strategy the Lead Member for Housing will provide the strategic overview and report to the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission on an annual basis.